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## THE AIM OF A COURSE IN ELEMENTARY ECONOMICS

The aim of elementary economics is to teach students to seek for economic truth. It is pre-eminently a mental discipline course with this tremendous advantage in its favor, that it is a course dealing with live questions, with human welfare, with problems of flesh and blood.

If properly conceived, it places the greatest responsibilities upon and offers the largest opportunities to the instructor. He should remember that the majority of those who come under his guidance will not, in all probability, after leaving him, continue their economic studies, and that what they acquire from him will be their only economic training—the only light that will illuminate for them the varied and intricate problems of everyday life, which they will have to face and to solve as men and as citizens.

Therefore the course should not be regarded as preliminary or preparatory to other courses. The chief concern of the instructor should be not for those who may be fortunate or unfortunate enough to continue their studies, but for those who will look back upon this initiatory instruction as their principal help in grappling with perplexing and often onerous circumstances, in which conflicting data and biased opinions not only hinder but frequently prevent a correct judgment, thus leading to false and dangerous results.

The student should be taught to observe economic conditions and to draw his own conclusions; to quote Professor Kinley: "he must be trained to think logically along economic lines." It seems to me that if the instructor succeeds in developing in the student the faculty to approach and to decide all economic issues in an unbiased, scientific way, he has done his duty and he may be well satisfied with his work.

It is regrettable that some of our instructors regard elementary economics as a purely informational course, losing sight of the fact that all economic data must be presented with one main object, that of making known and impressing economic prin-

ciples. Disconnected data, however valuable in themselves, if their presenter overlooks this object, are confusing and burdensome.

Naturally, it is easier and pleasanter to give students interesting facts, than to wrestle with ideas more difficult of comprehension and of elucidation; but this does not release the instructor from the responsibility of doing the latter work. As in most instances the course is given only during one semester, this brevity of opportunity obliges the instructor to devote his time to teaching what is most important, i. e., economic theory, using descriptive or narrative material only for purposes of illustration. Of course, purely abstract dogmas and hard and fast rules would be as out of place in this introductory work as would be concrete facts from which no logical inferences could be drawn.

The course may be advantageously used for purposes of acquainting and familiarizing the student with stores of information relating to economic matters, teaching him to distinguish between the temporary and the permanent, between the popular and the scientific. In this connection we may use contemporary discussions and findings of writers on economic history, governmental publications and handbooks, treatises and magazine articles. Such training necessarily develops in the student the critical faculty, the power of selection so important in dealing with controverted questions.

The instructor in elementary economics finds a different mental attitude on the part of the student body from that which an instructor in mathematics or physics finds. In the latter studies there is, so to speak, a clean, plastic condition—a mental blank—awaiting instruction, which it receives unquestioningly, whereas in the case of economics even the youngest students come with preconceived notions and ideas. But fortunately this last is an obstacle which intelligent presentation of a subject may easily overcome. The matter of presentation is of the greatest importance. The course should be given in an unprejudiced way. This necessarily entails on the part of the teacher a thorough acquaintance with his topic; he should be in posses-

sion of all the facts, but he must have these facts sifted and assimilated before addressing his class; otherwise, he will be able to give facts only and not principles.

If the goal of the university is truth, in the teaching of elementary economics more perhaps than in the teaching of any other disciplinary science, the university must remain the unbiased, instructing agent only.

It is not the purpose of a university to mold economic opinions or to send out partisans. The student should be made acquainted with the fundamental currents of human activity; but he must be left to do his own mental steering and to choose his own harbor. We do not wish to mold opinions, but we do wish to mold men—men of independent judgment, of clear vision, of determination to act conscientiously.

A great number of economic evils existing in modern society need more than anything else for their eradication, correct thinking on the part of the average man. Sometimes I have thought that few of us engaged in teaching realize how directly responsible we are for the future opinions and conduct of those who come under our influence, and how a little effort rightly directed would help to awaken social consciousness. Although this may be done in all lines of instruction, elementary economics offers peculiarly favorable ground for sowing the seeds of civic righteousness. Here we have an opportunity to direct attention to the fundamental relations existing between the forces engaged in the production and the distribution of wealth; to the activity and the rewards of the landowner and the capitalist, the entrepreneur and the laborer; to the problems arising in connection with domestic and foreign exchange; to the effects of distribution upon consumption and consumption upon production. I have heard Professor Kinley express the opinion that in the whole range of economic theory there is no principle which cannot be presented in a course of elementary economics and from my own more limited experience it seems to me that this is true.

The art of modern politics is the expression of economic principles. If we study the messages of our presidents and the bills introduced into our congresses, the legislative enactments

and the administrative measures of our government, we find that most of them deal directly or indirectly with the economic life of the nation, and that they are consciously or unconsciously the results of efforts to express the root principles of economic science.

Our government is the government of a democracy, and we should keep in mind that we are training future voters and public officials. Therefore, elementary economics must be primarily a course for citizenship.

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## METHODS OF TEACHING ELEMENTARY ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

My paper is to be an explanation of the methods used at Michigan rather than a discussion of methods in general. However, I shall not confine myself strictly to a statement of the facts, but shall discuss the various elements of method from the standpoint of what we are trying to do as well as of what we are actually doing; for I scarcely need say that we are a long way short of having worked out a set of methods which satisfies us, though we feel that we have made some progress toward this goal.

As the topic assigned me has to do with method, it is obviously not my business to treat objects which can properly be aimed at in a course in elementary economics. Nevertheless, it would scarcely be possible to explain satisfactorily the methods we have thought best to employ without first making clear the precise aims which we have set ourselves. To this task, therefore, we must give a few moments' attention.

In the first place, we conceive it to be our duty to insure, in so far as this is possible, that our students carry away with them a body of economic doctrine which has a high degree of definiteness, which is held with a firm and certain grasp, and which is, in some measure at least, available. Let me emphasize these particulars a little. We consider it our duty to insure, in so far as this is possible, the results named: that is, we do not accept the